

FWP COMMISSION AGENDA ITEM COVER SHEET

Meeting Date: December 9, 2010

Agenda Item: Milltown Dam Project – proposed land acquisitions and park development

Division: Parks

Action Needed: _____ **Approval of Tentative Rule** X **Approval of Final**
Rule/Action _____ **Endorse Course of Action** _____ **None - information only**

Time Needed on Agenda for this Presentation: 15 minutes

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Background

Montana Fish, Wildlife & Parks (FWP) proposes to purchase via fee title the 180-acre, four-parcel, Milltown Park property from The Nature Conservancy (TNC) located near the town of Bonner, Montana. The community of Bonner is in Missoula County, about 5 miles east of Missoula along the Interstate Highway 90 corridor. The proposed acquisition is the first step in a larger project for the confluence area of the Clark Fork and Blackfoot rivers. The Milltown Park project is a multi-year project to redevelop and restore the Milltown Dam and Reservoir area to provide a site that combines recreation opportunities, heritage tourism, and environmental education that serves as a new catalyst of economic opportunity for the Milltown and Bonner communities.

This initial step calls for the acquisition of the four TNC parcels near Bonner, the Blackfoot River, and the Milltown Dam overlook by FWP. These parcels are in addition to the 450+ acres of NorthWestern Energy lands that are scheduled to come to FWP as the core of the state park and would enhance the overall plans for the park. The size and location of the parcels are as follows:

- Parcel #1, locally known as Bonner Hill, is east of the Bonner School and is approximately 102 acres; FWP would transfer title to the 102-acre Bonner Hill parcel (Parcel 1) to the Bonner School District.
- Parcel #2 is just north of Bonner, north of the Blackfoot River across from the former Stimson Lumber Company Mill and is approximately 47 acres.
- Parcel #3 is west of Milltown, near the Milltown Dam overlook near the Clark Fork River and is approximately 19 acres.
- Parcel #4 is just northeast of Parcel 1, straddling Montana Highway 200, and south of the Blackfoot River and is approximately 11 acres.

Public Involvement and Process Results

An Environmental Assessment (EA) was released for public comment on October 28th with the comment period ending November 26th. A public meeting was held on November 10th and approximately 41 people attended. FWP received a total of 17 public comments, including 6 agencies/organizations in all, representing 44 individuals. All but 1 comment is in support of the proposed action, however, several comments listed some concerns.

Alternatives and Analysis

No-Action Alternative – FWP would not purchase the four parcels from TNC, and TNC would look for other conservation buyers that might meet their broader Montana Lands Project conservation goals. If no interested buyer is found, the property may be put on the real estate market for a private buyer. The dedicated Natural Resource Damage Program (NRDP) funds for this acquisition would be released to support other projects.

Proposed Alternative – FWP proposes to purchase via fee title approximately 180 acres near Bonner, to complete the first step in the redevelopment of the confluence area of the Blackfoot and Clark Fork Rivers as state park.

Agency Recommendation and Rationale

The Department recommends approval by the Commission to proceed with the acquisition of the 180 acres of land from TNC.

Proposed Motion

“I move that the Department proceed with the TNC land acquisitions at the Milltown site utilizing the NRD funding source.”